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ABSTRACT

This Academic Skills Mini-Module is one of the first documented efforts designed for encouraging students to prevent themselves from dropping out of college. It is also a reflection of research findings which maintain that any methods used to help students to improve their academic performance will also minimize attrition rates. Academic performance is a major factor in college attrition, irrespective of sex and racial origin. For that reason, the Academic Skills Mini-Module has been designed to be used as a workshop, an independent study, and a reference. It consists of 10 components providing information or self-assessment exercises: (1) academic skills; (2) goal-setting; (3) time management; (4) note-taking; (5) SQ3R Study Method (for reading assignments--Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review); (6) test-taking; (7) summary and self-assessment; (8) dropout prevention checklist; (9) academic skills workshop evaluation/feedback form; and (10) bibliography. The results of a series of tryouts indicate that this mini-module, although created initially for college students, can be modified and used on all educational levels. (GL)

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ACADEMIC SKILLS MINI-MODULE

TOOLS FOR ACHIEVING SUCCESS AT NSU

SERIES I: THE ROLE OF THE STUDENT IN DROP OUT INTERVENTION

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Abstract

This Academic Skills Mini-Module is one of the first documented efforts designed for encouraging students to prevent themselves from dropping out of college. It is also a reflection of the research findings of Astin (1975) which maintain that any methods used to help students to improve their academic performance will also minimize attrition rates. Academic performance is a major factor in college attrition, irrespective of sex and racial origin. For that reason, the Academic Skills Mini-Module has been designed to be used as a workshop, an independent study, and a reference. It consists of 10 components: 1) What do you know about Academic Skills? (Self-Assessment); 2) Goal-Setting; 3) Time Management; 4) Note-Taking; 5) SQ3R Study Method (For Reading Assignments--Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review); 6) Test-Taking; 7) Summary and Self-Assessment; 8) Drop Out Prevention Checklist; 9) Academic Skills Workshop Evaluation/ Feedback Form; 10) Bibliography. The results of a series of tryouts indicate that this Mini-Module--although created initially for college--can be modified and used on all educational levels.

ACADEMIC SKILLS MINI-MODULE

Introduction

You have a role to play in preventing yourself from dropping out of college. The purpose of this Academic Skills Mini-Module is to introduce you to a major objective of that role:

> To acquire academic skills which will help you to successfully complete your degree program and/or other intentions.

This mini-module has been designed to be used as--

1. A Workshop.
2. An Independent Study.
3. A Reference.

As a result, it includes very simple English and directions in order that a lot of information can be learned or reviewed within a short period of time.

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WHAT DC YOU KNOW ABCUT ACADEMIC SKILLS?

Directions
This self-assessment exercise is to be shared only with yourself. The objective is to focus attention on what you need to learn about academic skills. Please respond to each item below by circling the appropriate YES or NO.

1. Have you formulated long-term goals for your period of study at this university? YES NC

2. Do you practice time management on a daily basis? YES NC

3. Have you been taught how to take notes in classroom lectures? YES NO

4. Do you use a skimming and reviewing method to study your reading assignments? YES NO

5. Do you have special test-taking techniques for use in answering multiple choice, true-false, essay questions, etc.? YES NO

Workshop Participant
Even if you circled all responses as YES, please continue to participate in this workshop. It is unique. Emphasis is on learning by participating. Such experiences will enhance what you already know about academic skills.

Independent Study
Once you have completed all questions, go the beginning of the Module, Goal-Setting, page 3.

Cr
Go back to the Contents, page 1, and select a section that matches with one of your NC responses. For example, if you circled NO to Time Management, question 2, go to page 5.

GOAL-SETTING

Exercise

This exercise has been designed to determine how much you already know about goal-setting. Which of the following is a well-defined long-term goal? (Check only one correct answer.)

__ To keep my A in History.
__ To go shopping at Wal-Mart after I complete this class today.
__ To go to dinner this evening with Frank.
__ To attend the International Science Convention in Paris on January 20, 1982.
__ To meet Sally at South China tomorrow afternoon at 2:00 p.m.

To determine if you checked the correct answer to the above exercise, go through the following Steps I-VII.

Step I

What are the steps for setting goals?

1. Turn your dreams, ideas, questions, needs, etc., into a goal statement.
2. Write a specific, observable statement; what you intend to do.
3. Make it realistic, appropriate, and attainable.
4. Include a deadline, if possible.
5. Visualize steps for achievement of this goal.
6. Write those steps as simple, realistic, easy to observe statements.
7. List those steps in the order of MOST IMPORTANT.

Step II

Study the following example of a long-term goal and its steps for achievement.

To graduate as a nurse from _____University in 1990.

1. Keep a positive attitude.
2. Try to have a perfect attendance record in all classes.
3. Take good notes in all classes.
4. Stick to consistent, continuous study schedules.
5. Prepare thoroughly for all exams.
6. Pass all courses with a grade of C or above.
7. Read Nursing literature to increase vocabulary.
8. Balance study, work, and social activities.

Step III

Use the following CRITERIA CHECKLIST to evaluate the example Nursing goal and its steps.

__ Is the goal statement specific, observable?
__ Does the goal statement have a deadline?
__ Are the steps for the goal arranged in an order of priority, most imporant tasks arranged first?
__ Are the steps simply stated?
__ Are the steps realistic, appropriate, attainable?

Step IV

Review the preceding learning activities by studying these definitions--

1. Long-Term Goals--Specific activities that will be achieved within several months or a year or more, for example, graduation from _____ University.
2. Short-Term Goals--Specific activities that can be steps for the achievement of long-term goals, or tasks that can be completed within the next hour, for example, purchase text for Psychology 1010.

Step V

Go back to the Exercise, page 3. Which item did you check as a well-defined goal? Use the first two items in the CRITERIA CHECKLIST to confirm your selected answer.

Step VI

Begin formulating or reviewing your own goals.

Step VII

Try to realistically achieve your goals and/or steps on a daily-basis.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Exercise

The following is a list of things that you might do in one day at college. Rearrange the following list to emphasize doing MOST IMPORTANT activities first; create a DAILY PRIORITY TO-DO LIST.

TO DO LIST

Laundry to Wash by Hand _____

1:00 p.m. English _____

Bed _____

4:00 p.m. Swim Meet _____

Lunch _____

9:00 a.m. Biology _____

Study at Library _____

Dinner _____

10:00 a.m. Workstudy _____

Definitions

1. Time Management--A non-stressful approach to wisely using time; includes use of a DAILY PRIORITY TO-DO LIST.
2. Daily Priority To-Do List--A daily schedule of tasks which are completed in their order of priority--from the MOST IMPORTANT to the IMPORTANT to the LEAST IMPORTANT.

Steps and Evaluation Criteria for a Daily Priority To-Do List

1. List three activities that you need to do today.
2. Prioritize these activities; assign numbers, for example, 1-3, to MOST IMPORTANT to LEAST IMPORTANT activity.
3. Use self-discipline to complete the MOST IMPORTANT activity first.
4. Avoid doing the LEAST IMPORANT task first.
5. Cross off items as they are completed.
6. Reward yourself once all items have been completed.
7. The above steps 1-6 can be used to organize your thoughts: MOST IMPORTANT, IMPORTANT, and LEAST IMPORTANT.

Notes

1. The above technique can be expanded to include any realistic number of daily tasks.
2. Some noted successful individuals do their TO-DO LISTS at Night before retiring for Bed or in the Morning--usually one of the first activities.

NOTE-TAKING FOR CLASSROOM AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Note-Taking Demonstration--Step-By-Step Participation

The Cornell Note-Taking Format will be illustrated on the board for the following steps. (See page 8)

What To Do Before The Lecture Begins

1. Prepare yourself to concentrate. Main components are interest and attention.
   a. Pretend interest in a subject. Psychologists recommend this pretense as a way of helping the mind to develop a genuine interest.
   b. This general interest will lead to an attitude of attention.
   c. As a result, the concentration process is reversed.
   d. Attention produces interest.
   e. As the ability to concentrate increases, interest increases.
   f. The above steps will prevent boredom with courses.

2. Prepare yourself to listen intently, to focus listening.
   a. Note that listening is work, involving interest and attention.
   b. Focus attention on the content and total meaning of the lecture, not the appearance and delivery of the instructor.
   c. Avoid unnecessary interruptions.
   d. However, ask questions for clarification, when appropriate.
   e. Or, mark the section(s) for clarification and see the instructor after class or during office hours.

3. Prepare yourself to spend only half of the class time in writing notes. Write these notes neatly to avoid rewriting.

What To Do During the Lecture

1. Organize notes. They are forms of documentation.
   a. Provide title of lecture at the top of the first page.
   b. Write date of lecture and name of course or subject at the top of each page.
   c. Divide page into columns. The right-hand column should occupy two-thirds of the page.
   d. Record notes only in the right-hand column.

2. Listen or read for key ideas, main and sub-points.

3. Paraphrase. Try to write key ideas, main and sub-points in your own words. Avoid writing down every word of the instructor or from a textbook.

4. Leave adequate space between each key idea, main, and sub-point. They can also be underlined for emphasis and importance.

5. Use meaningful abbreviations, especially in long lectures.

6. Draw a line through any seeming error. Do not erase. This material may become important later.

7. Use the preceding steps to take notes of the following brief lecture or reading assignment.

   Use a Library--Libraries are designed for learning. The lighting is perfect. The noise level is low. Materials are available. Entering a library is a signal to your body to quiet the mind and get to work. Most people can get more done in a shorter time at a library. Experiment for yourself.

   David B. Ellis. (1985). Becoming a master student. Rapid City, SD: College Survival, page 49

What To Do After the Lecture

Review notes.

1. Within 24 hours review notes for at least five minutes.
2. Once a week review notes for an hour, or longer if preparing for an exam.
3. Write key words and sample questions in the left-hand column when reviewing.
4. Use these key words and sample questions as guides when preparing for an exam. They can help you to further organize notes.

The Cornell Note-Taking Format is illustrated on the following page.

Cornell Note-Taking Format

Use of the Library	Libraries designed for learning Perfect lighting, little noise, available materials
Why is the library an ideal place for study?	Entry of library motivates body to want to work More can be done in a shorter time at a library

Note: Because of the use of the typewriter, the spacing and format for the above Cornell is exaggerated.

Other Note-Taking Formats

Paragraph Format

Main and sub-points are arranged into paragraphs which are separated by adequate spacing to permit later note additions. This format can be used successfully with fast-paced lectures.

Example

Significance of library. Constructed for learning. Perfect lighting. Little noise. Abundant materials.

Entering library. Body quiets mind; ready to work. Complete projects quicker.

Outline Format

This format can be effectively defined as main and sub-points that are emphasized through the divisions and indentations of Roman Numerals, alphabets, and numbers.

Example

Cornell Note-Taking Format

I. Used for organizing and reviewing notes
   A. Structure
      1. Two-thirds right col.
      2. One-third left col.
   B. Components
      1. Right col.--Notes
         a. Key ideas
         b. Main
         c. Sub-points
         d. Adequate Spacing
      2. Left col.--Reviewing
         a. Key words
         b. Sample Questions
         c. Adequate space

II. Used in most lectures

The outline format can be used successfully with an organized lecture and when reading or reviewing parts of a text or notes. It is a major tool for responding to an essay question.

Review

1. Note-Taking--focused thinking, active listening, key ideas, main points, sub-points, and adequate spacing.
2. Cornell Format--page divided into two columns. The right-hand column should occupy two-thirds of the page. Record notes only in the right-hand column. When reviewing notes, use the left-hand column for key words and sample questions. This format can be used for most lectures.

SQ3R STUDY METHOD

Practice Independent Study

As a practice exercise, select a chapter from one of your favorite textbooks and use the SQ3R Study Method. It is composed of five steps (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review). The basic aim of this method is to help you to enhance your ability to sort out meaningful information and to recall it accurately.

Dr. Francis P. Robinson invented and included the SQ3R method in his EFFECTIVE STUDY publication of 1946. The Method can be used--with some modifications--in all fields of study.

Step 1--Survey (Preview, Skim)

Read bold type, topic sentences, summary paragraphs, review questions in your selected chapter. Objective--To obtain an idea, a feeling for the content.

Step 2--Question

What is the important information in this chapter?

a. Turn the bold face type or topic sentences into questions.
b. Questioning will help you to link information in the assignment to what you already know.

Step 3--Read

Read for ideas--especially to answer the questions you have created.

a. Read one section at a time.
b. Go to next step.

Step 4--Recite

Answer questions you have created without looking at notes or at textbook.

a. After answering questions, go to the next section of the chapter, read it, and answer questions you have asked.
b. Continue reading and reciting until you have completed the chapter.

Step 5--Review

a. Complete the chapter.
b. Look away from book. Silently recall main and sub-points.
c. Go over notes. Look away from notes. Silently recall main and sub-points.
d. This review approach will result in a comprehensive grasp of content.

Summary of Major Components of Many Study Methods

Studying is more than just reading, it includes classification and recall of information. Study methods will--

a. Help you identify important information: What is to be learned.
b. Help you quickly understand it.
c. Make it easier to memorize.
d. Improve your responses and grades.

Major Components

1. Preview (Preliminary Survey)
   a. Read introductory paragraph, bold face type, summary and/or review section and questions at end of chapter.
   b. If these elements are not included, preview topic sentence of each paragraph.
   c. Usually the first or second sentence, the topic sentence will describe the content of the paragraph.
   d. This quick skimming process will enable you to gain an overview of the chapter.
   e. It will also increase your ability to organize information into meaningful groups and remember what you have read.

2. Read
   a. Read carefully and quickly for ideas.
   b. Paraphrase. Write these ideas in your own words in a note-taking format or underline their key phrases, if using your textbook.
   c. You will be able to quickly read the chapter, if you have completed the first step--Preview.
   d. The Preview will enable you to increase your reading speed because you--
      1) Have started thinking about the topic.
      2) Are familiar with the major ideas.
      3) Analyzed and organized important information into meaningful groups.
      4) Understand the information.

3. Review
   a. Read the entire chapter.
   b. Think about what you have have read.
      1) Recall major ideas.
      2) Test yourself by creating and answering questions about the content of the chapter.
      3) This questioning process will help you to anticipate the questions that the instructor will be using in the next lecture and/or test.

TEST-TAKING

Objective Tests

For objective tests, try to answer all questions in their listed order. Mark doubtful answers and recheck later if there is time. Use the same approach to answer true-false and multiple-choice items. Multiple-choice items are actually an arrangement of groups of true-false.

True-False Questions

1. Read thoroughly and make sure you understand the directions.
2. Try to quickly answer true-false items. These questions are generally not as valuable in points as the multiple choice and essay.
3. Indicate false to any statement that is partly false.
4. Indicate false to any statements that contain absolute qualifiers of always or never. They usually symbolize false statements.

Examples

__ When reviewing lecture notes in the Cornell format, a student will usually add key words and Roman Numerals to its right-hand column.

__ Abbreviations should never be used in the Paragraph Note-Taking format.

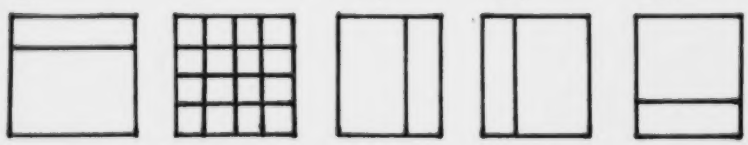
Multiple Choice Questions

1. Read thoroughly and make sure you understand the directions.
2. Try to answer the question in your mind before you read all of the possible answers.
3. Then, eliminate and match mind answer with one of the listed answers.
4. Mark. Come back later to questions which you are unable to answer. You may find a clue in another part of the test.
5. Guess only if wrong answers will not be penalized.

Examples

Which of the following provides structure for good, organized note-taking and reviewing? (Circle the correct answer.)

a. b. c. d. e.



Directions
Check below only one answer.

Which tool is the most effective for helping you to successfully use your time wisely on a daily basis?

__ Daily-To-Do List
__ Mid-Term Goal
__ First Step
__ None of the Above

Short Answer, Fill-in the Blanks

1. Know study material backwards and forwards.
2. Emphasize key words and facts.
3. Spell correctly; may lose points for misspellings.
4. Be brief.

Example

John consistently uses one kind of note-taking format in all three of his history courses. When reviewing his notes in this format, he can include key words and sample questions. This note-taking format is the _____.

Machine Graded Tests

Make sure your marked response on the answer sheet matches the numbered test question.

Essay Tests

1. Read thoroughly and make sure you understand the directions.
2. Use a separate page to plan your answer.
3. Pace yourself.
4. Answer easiest questions first.
5. Organize your answer(s). Use an outline. (See page 9)
6. Be specific.
7. Use the vocabulary of the course.
8. Do not waste time trying to criticize or question the instructor's accuracy.
9. Try to answer every question. Provide some kind of answer. Partial answers often count for partial credit.
10. Do not include excuses.
11. Write neatly.
12. Proofread. Make necessary corrections.

Open-Book Tests

The open-book may consist of only one kind of test (objective or essay) or may include both.

1. Organize data for this class test.
2. Study for the open-book as if you are studying for any other test.
3. Prepare thoroughly.
4. Considered sometimes to be the most difficult test because students assume that there is no need to study or organize information because it will be used during the exam period.

Test-Taking Strategies (Step-By-Step Checklists)

Before an Examination

__ 1. Keep up. Begin reviewing the first day of class, for about five or more minutes. Review weekly about an hour for each subject. Do major reviews about a week before a final exam. Including breaks, the major review time should range from two to five hours. These three kinds of reviewing will prevent last minute cramming. (Review techniques are on pages 10-11.)

__ 2. To avoid rereading textbook assignments later, underline topic sentences, key words and phrases. Write summary notes in the margins of the pages.

__ 3. To understand material for memorization, ask for clarification, preferably from the instructor and/or a competent classmate.

__ 4. Spend more time in weekly and major reviews with least familiar material.

__ 5. Review lecture notes and previous exams in order to predict instructor test items.

__ 6. Inquire from instructor about the type and content of an exam, if such information is not presented in class.

__ 7. Match your study to type of exam. Concentrate on memorizing factual details, for example, names and formulas for an objective test. Concentrate on thoroughly understanding general concepts, principles and theories for an essay exam. Work example problems that may be anticipated for a problem-solving type test.

__ 8. Rethink quietly through a comprehensive final review of lecture and reading assignment material the night before an exam. Then try to get a good night's sleep.

__ 9. To keep blood sugar up to provide necessary energy, eat a high-protein breakfast on the day of the test.

__ 10. Arrive to class on time; not to early; not too late. This action will reduce tension.

__ 11. Avoid sitting where you will have distractions, as with a friend.

During the Examination

__ 1. Remain calm during the test. (Slowly and deliberately breathe through your nose several times. This exercise will enhance calmness.)
__ 2. Begin the test--before looking at it--by writing on the back memory tools and facts that you may forget later.
__ 3. Maintain a positive attitude--a major test-taking strategy. Visualize yourself doing well on this exam, especially if you have adequately studied.
__ 4. Make plans for pacing yourself. Quickly scan the entire test. This technique will help you to wisely budget your time for each major part.
__ 5. Read carefully and make sure all parts of the directions are clear.
__ 6. Read each question carefully and completely. Make sure that you understand.
__ 7. Return later to items which you cannot answer initially. Another part of the test may provide a clue.
__ 8. Request clarification from your instructor if a certain test question appears confusing.
__ 9. Avoid presenting the impression you are cheating and/or providing answers to another student.
__ 10. Take this test at your own pace. Ignore students who finish early.
__ 11. Use all of the test time period to work at your own pace and to review for any careless errors which call for correction.

After the Examination

__ 1. Do an item analysis of the returned test. Try to find out what you failed to do. Discuss this test with your instructor. These activities will help you to become proficient in test-taking.
__ 2. Analysis of your returned test will also reveal the style or format of your instructor. This knowledge will help you to accurately predict more questions when studying for the next exam.
__ 3. Establish a partnership in learning with your instructor. Make an appointment to discuss the returned test. This effort will help the instructor to remember your scholarly attitude which could also make a favorable difference between the final grade of a B or an A.
__ 4. Remain confident if you fail an exam. Have hope. The grade is not final. There are other solutions--
    a. Tutoring.
    b. Make-up exam.
    c. Extra project.
    d. Withdrawal from course.
    e. Counseling with the instructor.
__ 5. Accept a test score with a sense of humor.

SUMMARY AND SELF-ASSESSMENT

Academic skills are major tools to help you prevent yourself from dropping out of a college.

Goal-Setting
The KEY to helping you to organize and achieve your realistic college BIG PICTURE--completion of a degree program and/or other objectives.

Who am I?
What are my interests, strengths, and weaknesses?
What steps can I take to make improvements?
What is my purpose in life?
How can I achieve that purpose?

Time Management
The KEY to daily continuous organization of the self and control of time which will lead to the achievement of important, realistic steps toward your long and short-term goals.

What are the most important tasks for completion today?
Which most important tasks should be completed first?

Note-Taking
The KEY to the daily continuous organization and documentation of knowledge and skills which will help you to achieve your goals.

What are the key ideas, main and sub-points of this lecture?
Should I use the paragraph, Cornell, outline or my own modified note-taking format in this lecture?

SQ3R Study Method
The KEY to using time wisely while organizing and retaining knowledge and skills from a study of a given reading assignment.

Should I use all or modify steps of the SQ3R Study Method in this particular reading assignment?

Test-Taking

The KEY to confirming the goals of effective note-taking, study scheduling, and reviewing.

Have I prepared adequately for this examination?
Which test formats will be included in this examination?
Will I pace myself in this examination so that I have enough time to double-check, proofread, and correct my responses?

DROP OUT PREVENTION CHECKLIST

Based on research findings, Astin (1975) reported twelve reasons for dropping out of college:

__ Boredom with courses;
__ Financial difficulties;
__ Some other reasons;
__ Marriage, pregnancy, or other family responsibilities;
__ Poor grades;
__ Dissatisfaction with requirements or regulations;
__ Change in career goals;
__ Inability to take desired courses or programs;
__ Good job offer;
__ Illness or accident;
__ Difficulty commuting to college;
__ Disciplinary troubles (p. 14).

The above items are listed in the checklist order of most frequent to least frequent reasons for dropping out of college.

This checklist can be used as a tool to prevent yourself from dropping out. If you check any of the above, see and discuss the items with your academic adviser or another professional who can help in the process of finding or creating positive, workable solutions.

Revised

ACADEMIC SKILLS WORKSHOP EVALUATION/FEEDBACK FORM
(Original Form by Dan Seymour)

(1) ON THE SCALE BELOW, INDICATE YOUR DEGREE OF OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE WORKSHOP.

Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	More Dissatisfied than Satisfied	More Satisfied than Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied

PLEASE COMMENT ON WHY YOU CHECKED WHERE YOU DID:

(2) HOW SATISFIED WERE YOU WITH THE WORKSHOP FORMAT?

Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	More Dissatisfied than Satisfied	More Satisfied than Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied

PLEASE COMMENT ON WHY YOU CHECKED WHERE YOU DID:

(3) WHAT ACADEMIC SKILLS DID YOU LEARN?

(4) WHAT MODIFICATIONS WOULD YOU SUGGEST FOR IMPROVING THIS WORKSHOP FOR FUTURE PARTICIPANTS?

WHAT WERE THE STRONGEST FEATURES OF THE WORKSHOP?

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